PITTA

Newsletter of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh
New Series Volume 14 Number 3 March 2017

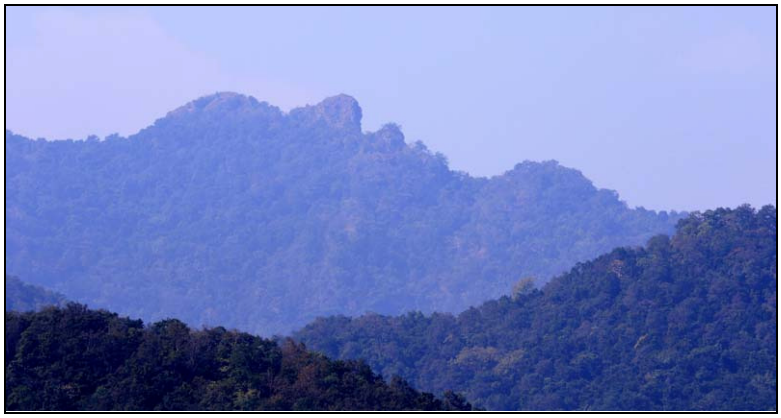
FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 26th March 2017: Mrugavani Deer Park, Chilkur, 6.30AM.

Chilkur is located around 25km from the city and is home to a lot of woodland birds. Keep a lookout for the Asian Paradise-flycatcher and other scrub forest birds. The Blue-faced Malkoha and the Pied Crested Cuckoo are also usually seen here.

This will be a half-day trip. For further details and to co-ordinate, please contact Ms Surekha Aitabathula (99490-38532).

Trip report: Papikonda, Dec 2016

Dr Jayati Mitra



View at Papikonda (Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

It was a cool morning in the month of December 2016 at Rajamundry. After an overnight journey by train from Hyderabad we reached the makeshift jetty on the bank of river Godavari, where a bright yellow boat with a blue baseline was waiting to pick us up. After walking down the uneven slope, we carefully crossed over the shaky wooden plank to reach our boat and seated ourselves comfortably. The boat sailed to our destination, Papikonda.

On the boat (Photo courtesy: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

The surrounding atmosphere was very calm and quiet. The vast expanse of water on all sides led to the distant shoreline which appeared mostly sandy but at times gave way to beautiful rock formations, gradually blending with dense vegetation uphill. At this point we were served piping hot breakfast, and informed that the journey to our camping site would take more than six hours. Naturally we tried to look for birds amidst this pristine setting but they were few and far between.

There was an occasional sighting of a Little Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax niger*) sitting quietly and a White-throated Kingfisher (*Halcyon smyrnensis*) trying to fish in the quiet waters. Flocks of egrets flew across trying to reach the river bank on the other side. At one point the boat came closer to the bank and moved parallel to it, when we sighted a huge flock of Little Stints (*Calidris minuta*) flying right over the water's surface. When they abruptly turned, their pointed wings glistened in the sunlight.

River Lapwing (Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

Great Thick-knee (Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

Green Sandpiper (Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

Amidst some huge boulders we saw a River Lapwing (*Vanellus duvaucelii*) perfectly camouflaged against the natural settings. A small island in the middle of the river had a mixed flock of sandpipers, Small Pratincole (*Glareola lacteal*) and other waders. A Kentish Plover (*Charadrius alexandrinus*) was running around and feeding on the bank.

House Crow (Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

House Sparrow (female) (Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

By this time it was noon and our boat was anchored for a short while at a local village. There was a small temple where we saw birds like House Crows (*Corvus splendens*), House Sparrows (*Passer domesticus*) and Cattle Egrets (*Bubulcus ibis*).

Cattle Egret (Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

Sirivaka Resort (Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

The boat sailed again. It was about 3:00PM when our camping site, Sirivaka Resort came into view. There were rows of brightly coloured bamboo huts, red blue and yellow, set amidst the surrounding hills covered with deep vegetation. We finally disembarked at the jetty of the resort at Koruturu village. After settling down we set out for an evening walk along the winding path that led to the right side of the forest area.

Chestnut-headed Bee-eater
(Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

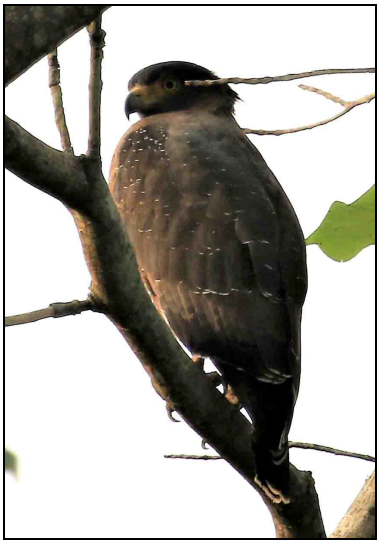
Initially we sighted only a Laughing Dove (*Stigmatopelia senegalensis*), but as we went further we could hear a lot of chirping around us. About half a dozen Chestnut-headed Bee-eaters (*Merops leschenaultia*) were lined up on the electric cable, facing the warm glow of the setting sun. We stood there for a while to look at these pretty, colourful birds. The commonly-seen Green Bee-eater was not present among them. Barbets, both Coppersmith (*Megalaima haemacephala*) and Brown-headed (*Megalaima zeylanica*), called in unison. The forest trail led to a place covered with teak, bamboo and fig trees. We could spot a Pied Bushchat (*Saxicola caprata*) sitting on the fence dividing the adjacent cultivated fields. Dusk was setting in as we started back and were greeted by a flock of Indian Silverbills (*Euodice malabarica*). Barn Swallows (*Hirundo rustica*) and Wire-tailed Swallows (*Hirundo smithii*) started circling the field full of pulses. As night approached nothing seemed more appropriate than sitting around a bonfire on that cold moonlit night near the river bank. We finally retired after having a delicious dinner.

Black Eagle (Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

Next morning we started on a long trek along a path parallel to the river bank. Bird calls were very few, quite unusual for such a densely forested area. A Common Hoopoe (*Upupa epops*) was seen flying across. The most heard call was that of the White-browed Bulbul (*Pycnonotus luteolus*) which we could also see quite often. The small shrubs lined along the path had colonies of Ashy Prinias (*Prinia socialis*). At sunrise flocks of Pale-billed Flowerpeckers (*Dicaeum erythrorhynchos*) flew from tree to tree. There were Common Ioras (*Aegithina tiphia*) singing different tunes which confused us at times. A flowering tree was full of Oriental White-eyes (*Zosterops palpebrosus*). Chestnut-headed Bee-eaters were also present in good numbers.

Red-naped Ibis (Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

We spotted a White-bellied Drongo (*Dicrurus caerulescens*) and Black Drongos (*Dicrurus macrocercus*) but after a while our attention was focused on a Crested Serpent Eagle (*Spilornis cheela*) that was sitting still for quite a while on a bare branch of a distant tree. It flew up into the sky spreading its wide wings, slowly gliding up and finally disappearing from our sight.



Crested Serpent Eagle (Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

Red-whiskered Bulbul
(Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

We crossed the village and walked to the end of the path where female Indian Golden Orioles (*Oriolus kundoo*) and a juvenile posed for us. Both Red-whiskered (*Pycnonotus jocosus*) and Red-vented Bulbuls (*Pycnonotus cafer*) were visible throughout the trek.

As we were returning, a warbler was restlessly flying among the branches but the dense green foliage made it difficult for us to observe it properly.

Indian Golden Oriole (Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

At this point we noticed something dark creeping up the main trunk when we could make out the bright red crown and white spotted black plumage. It was the Fulvous-breasted Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos macei*) pecking on the trunk but it soon disappeared on to the other side and we lost the sight of this beautiful bird.

Fulvous-breasted Woodpecker
(Photo: Dr Jayati Mitra)

By this time it was late morning. We saw a Tawny-bellied Babbler (*Dumetia hyperythra*) flying, its bright rufous underbelly visible in the bright sunshine. A shy Blue-faced Malkoha (*Rhopodytes viridirostris*) quickly hid out of view. The Purple Sunbirds (*Cinnyris asiaticus*), however, remained very active, calling from the flowering trees lined all along our path.

As we reached our camp another notable sighting was that of a small brown bird perched on a dead stump on the outskirts of our resort. After observing the scaly pattern on its wings we identified it as a female Blue Rock Thrush (*Monticola solitarius*).

Blue Rock Thrush (female)
(Photo: Dr Jayati Mitra)

A little later a few of the more enthusiastic birders made another quick trek on the right side of the resort. After reaching a huge tree with a dense canopy we could hear numerous birdsongs. All were a little tired and decided to rest beneath the tree. It was here that a bird was seen very high up on the tree moving like a black shadow. We patiently sat and enjoyed the sweet music till the Golden-fronted Leafbird (*Chloropsis aurifrons*) flew and showed up in front of us on another tree.

Golden-fronted Leafbird
(Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

After lunch we crossed the river and reached Tadivada village .The river bank was very steep and we had to tread through the deep slippery sand which held back some of the members. Anyway, the Ashy Woodswallow (*Artamus fuscus*) was clearly visible from the bank. The path was very scenic with broad-leaved trees lined on both sides. Here there was a Green Bee-eater for a change.

Green Bee-eater
(Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

As we walked along we could hear the chattering as a flock of Plum-headed Parakeets (*Psittacula cyanocephala*) greeted us. The path ultimately led to a small stream flowing merrily and meandering through the boulders where a Yellow Wagtail (*Motacilla flava*) was running around rapidly and calling sweetly. It was a very scenic spot with this small stream in the centre surrounded by distant verdant hills on all sides.

Brown Shrike
(Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

A Brown Shrike (*Lanius cristatus*) was hunting among the shrubs towards the edge of the forest. In the meantime our friends Sheetal and Shweta had left our small group to explore an alternative path near the river bank. When we returned we were in for a surprise. They narrated the sighting of a flying pair of Great Hornbills (*Buceros bicornis*) which made our day.

Pied Kingfisher (Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

It was the final morning of our trip. We left for Papikonda National Park which is known for the presence of leopards. The Peramtalapalli village came en route. The villagers here were pretty skilled in crafts and they displayed beautiful objects made out of bamboo for daily use as well as for decorative purposes. The terrain was hilly with a stream cutting across through the forest. A parallel path followed the stream at a higher altitude. We walked along this trail listening to mixed calls of barbets, orioles and ultimately stepped into the stream to sooth our tired feet. Rufous Treepies (*Dendrocitta vagabunda*) flew from treetops. Ruddy Shelducks (*Tadorna ferruginea*) were also seen by some members.

Ruddy Shelduck (Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

Now it was time to return. We walked through the cashew plantations and also observed the smouldering vegetation in the surrounding areas; it seemed to be an indication that the forest is being further cleared for future farming.

After a hurried lunch we again boarded the boat to return to Rajamundry and back home to Hyderabad. A point to ponder over was that bird density was very low despite the rich vegetation and abundance of water in the area but nevertheless it had been a very memorable journey.

Crested Hawk Eagle
(Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

The full list of birds sighted during the trip is given below:

Sl no#	Common Name	Scientific Name	Sl no#	Common Name	Scientific Name
1	House Crow	Corvus splendens	11	Indian Robin	Saxicoloides fulicatus
2	Common Myna	Acridotheres tristis	12	White-browed Bulbul	Pycnonotus luteolus
3	Spotted Dove	Stigmatopelia chinensis	13	Red-vented Bulbul	Pycnonotus cafer
4	Kentish Plover	Charadrius alexandrines	14	Red-whiskered Bulbul	Pycnonotus jocosus
5	Common Sandpiper	Actitis hypoleucos	15	Green Bee-eater	Merops orientalis
6	River Lapwing	Vanellus duvaucelii	16	Chestnut-headed Bee-eater	Merops leschenaulti
7	Cattle Egret	Bubulcus ibis	17	Indian Silverbill	Euodice malabarica
8	Little Egret	Egretta garzetta	18	Plum-headed Parakeet	Psittacula cyanocephala
9	Intermediate Egret	Mesophoyx intermedia	19	Laughing Dove	Stigmatopelia senegalensis
10	Ashy Prinia	Prinia socialis	20	House Sparrow	Passer domesticus

Sl no#	Common Name	Scientific Name	Sl no#	Common Name	Scientific Name
21	Indian Golden Oriole	Oriolus kundoo	52	Ashy Woodswallow	Artamus fuscus
22	Black Drongo	Dicrurus macrocercus	53	Ashy-crowned Sparrow Lark	Eremopterix griseus
23	White-bellied Drongo	Dicrurus caerulescens	54	Common Greenshank	Tringa nebularia
24	Greenish Warbler	Phylloscopus trochiloides	55	Marsh Sandpiper	Tringa stagnatilis
25	Pale-billed Flowerpecker	Dicaeum erythrorhynchos	56	Ruddy Shelduck	Tadorna ferruginea
26	Fulvous-breasted Woodpecker	Dendrocopos macei	57	Red-crested Pochard	Netta rufina
27	Asian Pied Starling	Gracupica contra	58	Northern Pintail	Anas acuta
28	Barn Swallow	Hirundo rustica	59	Spot-billed Duck	Anas poecilorhyncha
29	Wire-tailed Swallow	Hirundo smithii	60	Great Hornbill	Buceros bicornis
30	House Swift	Apus (affinis) nipalensis	61	Coppersmith Barbet	Megalaima haemacephala
31	Asian Palm Swift	Cypsivrus balasiensis	62	Common Tailorbird	Orthotomus sutorius
32	Orange-headed Thrush	Zoothera citrina	63	Brown Shrike	Lanius cristatus
33	Little Stint	Calidris minuta	64	Grey Junglefowl	Gallus sonneratii
34	Eurasian Thick-knee	Burhinus oedicnemus	65	Indian Pond Heron	Ardeola grayii
35	Crested Serpent Eagle	Spilornis cheela	66	Grey Francolin	Francolinus pondicerianus
36	Black Eagle	Ictinaetus malayensis	67	Rose-ringed Parakeet	Psittacula krameri
37	Large-billed Crow	Corvus macrorhynchos	68	Jerdon’s Leafbird	Chloropsis jerdoni
38	Shikra	Accipter badius	69	Red-naped Ibis	Pseudibis papillosa
39	Grey Wagtail	Motacilla cinerea	70	Little Cormorant	Phalacrocorax niger
40	Yellow Wagtail	Motacilla flava	71	Black-headed Munia	Lonchura kelaarti
41	Pied Bushchat	Saxicola torquatus	72	White-throated Kingfisher	Halcyon smyrnensis
42	Blue Rock Thrush	Monticola solitarius	73	Pied Kingfisher	Ceryle rudis
43	Scaly-breasted Munia	Lonchura punctulata	74	Greater Coucal	Centropus cinensis
44	Red Collared Dove	Streptopelia tranquebarica	75	Black-hooded Oriole	Oriolus xanthornus
45	Golden-fronted Leafbird	Chloropsis aurifrons	76	Red-wattled Lapwing	Vanellus indicus
46	Verditer Flycatcher	Eumyias thalassinus	77	White-browed Wagtail	Motacilla maderaspatensis
47	Purple Sunbird	Cinnyris asiaticus	78	Rufous Woodpecker	Micropternus brachycerus
48	Tawny Eagle	Aquila rapax	79	Oriental White-eye	Zosterops palpebrosus
49	Tawny-bellied Babbler	Dumetia hyperythra	80	Great Crested Grebe	Podiceps cristatus
50	Rufous Treepie	Dendrocitta vagabunda	81	Blue-faced Malkoha	Rhopodytes viridirostris
51	Large Grey Babbler	Turdoides malcolmi	82	Northern Shoveler	Anas clypeata

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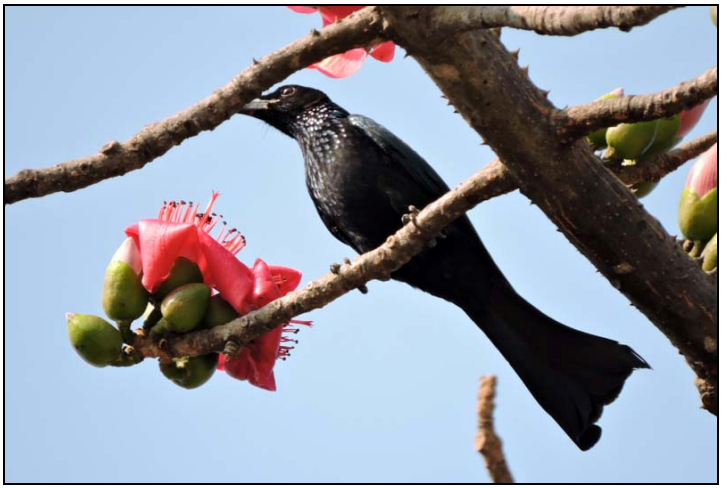
Report: Spangled Drongo in Secunderabad Cantonment, February 2017

Text and photos: Yella Prakash Rao



Spangled Drongo

Its spring time once again and here they come. Yes, the Spangled Drongos (*Dicrurus hottentottus*) have arrived and can be seen on the same trees as of last year. This species surely stands out as it has wrinkled tail feathers and shiny feathers around its neck resembling a diamond studded necklace.

These birds have been visiting Secunderabad Cantonment between January and March every year and are seen feeding on the flowers of the Flame of the Forest and Indian Silk Cotton trees.

The field guide distribution map indicates isolated records, one or more in the same area, where they have been tracked for the past four years foraging on the same trees. They were absent in the area between April to December.

It is heartening to know that they are visiting the same trees year after year and I pray that this ecosystem survives this way.

A ringing effort with GPS trackers may reveal their journey details.

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A Visit to Kawal Wildlife Sanctuary, January 2017

Sita Susarla

A view of Kawal WLS (Photo: Sita Susarla)

The Kawal Wildlife Sanctuary is located in Mancherial district (erstwhile Adilabad district) and is spread over an area of 893 km^2. The sanctuary houses Dry Deciduous Teak Forests mixed with Bamboo, Terminalia, Pterocarpus, Anogeisus and Cassias. River Kadem flows through this area.

Kadem Dam (Photo: Sita Susarla)

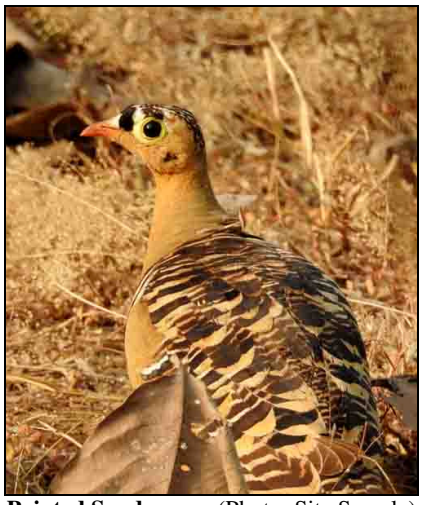
We, a team of five people, set out on a birding trip to Kawal on a winter morning in January. Our first halt was at Kadem Dam. As we stepped into the Haritha Resort, we sighted an immature Barred Buttonquail (*Turnix suscitator*). It was not as shy as quails generally are. We managed to get some pictures before it disappeared into the nearby bushes.

Barred Buttonquail (Photo: Sita Susarla)

After a quick breakfast we walked along the dam and nearby areas. There was a Blue Rock Thrush (*Monticola solitarius*) perched on an electric pole. We spotted a pair of River Lapwings (*Vanellus duvaucelii*) at the rocky edge of the dam.

River Lapwing (Photo: Sita Susarla)

Very close to them were a Green Sandpiper (*Tringa ochropus*), an Asian Openbill (*Anastomus oscitans*), some Ruddy Shelducks (*Tadorna ferruginea*), a Pied Kingfisher (*Ceryle rudis*) and a Common Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*). There were many Blue-tailed Bee-eaters (*Merops philippinus*), Large Grey Babblers (*Turdoides malcolmi*) and Black-headed Ibis (*Threskiornis melanocephalus*).



Painted Sandgrouse (Photo: Sita Susarla)

From Kadem we drove up to the Kawal Wildlife Sanctuary, some 30km away. At 3:30PM, we went for a safari inside the sanctuary. Though the guides were used to showing animals they took special care to assist us in spotting birds also. But for them we would not have seen Painted Sandgrouse (*Pterocles indicus*), 5 of them, that were completely camouflaged by layers of dry leaves. It was a great sighting! The forests around the pristine water bodies were home to flycatchers, Plum-headed Parakeets (*Psittacula cyanocephala*), Black Redstart (*Phoenicurus ochruros*) and Chestnut-shouldered Petronias (*Gymnoris xanthocollis*).

Mottled Wood Owl (Photo: Ashis Pradhan)

We waited till dusk to hear and feel the life in the forest. A Mottled Wood Owl (*Strix ocellata*) with its distinct call echoing across the forest was another interesting species. We halted for the night at the Forest Department guesthouse in Jannaram, at the end of the sanctuary. That is when the forest officer gave us information of a birding hotspot about 20km from Kawal.

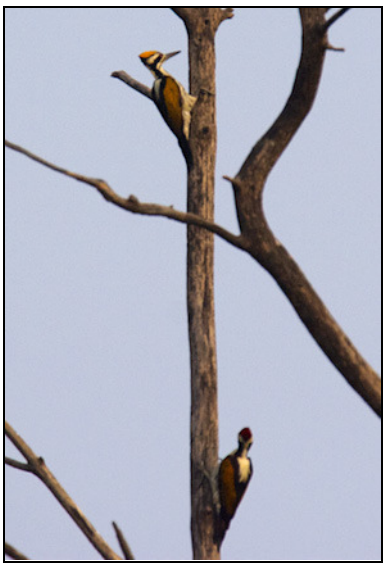
Woolly-necked Stork (Photo: Gopalakrishna Iyer)

Black Stork (Photo: Ashis Pradhan)

This place, Kalpakunta by name, was a real find. It was a breathtaking location – a small water body with an open area that was surrounded by the forest. We reached there by 7:30AM and sighted Woolly-necked Stork (*Ciconia episcopus*), Black Stork (*Ciconia nigra*), Spotted Redshank (*Tringa erythropus*), Asian Openbills, Common Teals (*Anas crecca*), Yellow-footed Green Pigeons (*Treron phoenicopterus*), Ashy Woodswallows (*Artamus fuscus*) and White-naped Woodpeckers (*Chrysocolaptus festivus*), to name a few. One of the teammates sighted a White-rumped Munia (*Lonchura striata*).

Spotted Redshank (Photo: Ashis Pradhan)

Yellow-footed Green Pigeon
(Photo: Sita Susarla)



White-naped Woodpecker (pair)
(Photo: Ashis Pradhan)

White-eyed Buzzard (Photo: Sita Susarla)

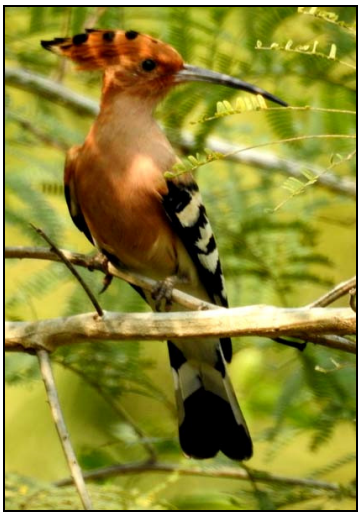
By 10:30AM we were back in the sanctuary for another safari to see the remaining part. Here we sighted a White-eyed Buzzard (*Butastur teesa*) perched on a tree branch right in front of us. We could take some quick pictures of the raptor. Moving forward we sighted Common Woodshrike (*Tephrodornis pondicerianus*), Small Minivets (*Pericrocotus cinnamomeus*), and Alexandrine Parakeets (*Psittacula eupatria*). Some Olive-backed Pipits (*Anthus hodgsoni*) were seen bathing in the pond waters.

Common Woodshrike (Photo: Ashis Pradhan)

Alexandrine Parakeet (Photo: Gopalakrishna Iyer)

White-browed Fantail (Photo: Ashis Pradhan)

Within the Forest Department guesthouse compound, we saw a White-browed Fantail (*Rhipidura aureola*) and a Red-breasted Flycatcher (*Ficedula parva*). The drive back was full of excited conversations of the fantastic sights of the forest and our winged friends that live in its environs.



Common Hoopoe (Photo: Sita Susarla)

Cinereous Tit (Photo: Ashis Pradhan)

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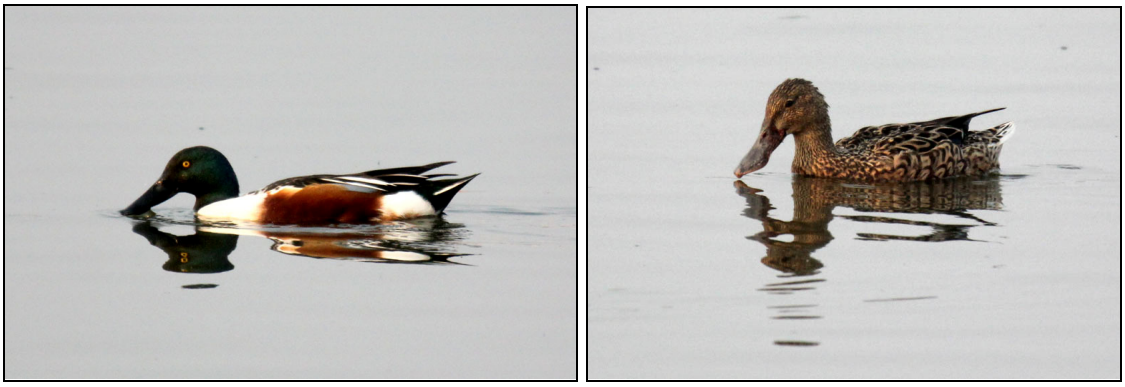
Bird of the Month

Text & photos: Umesh Mani

Northern Shoveler (*Anas clypeata*)



Northern Shoveler Male (L) and Female (R) (Chennai, 19-03-2017)

Order: Anseriformes
Family: Anatidae
Genus: *Anas*
Species: *A. clypeata*
Size: 44-52cm

Description & distribution: The Northern Shoveler is a duck that is found commonly across large parts of the world. It is most easily identified by its large, spatulate bill. The breeding male has an iridescent, dark green head, white breast, and chestnut belly and flanks, and orange legs. A flying bird shows pale blue forewing feathers, separated from the metallic green speculum by a white patch or border. By early fall, the male also has a white crescent on the sides of the face. In non-breeding plumage, the male is similar to the female, which is drab mottled brown, much like the females of most other dabbling ducks, and has grey forewings. The broad bill which, on the cutting edge and the lower mandible, is grey tinged with orange, helps distinguish it from other similar birds.

The Northern Shoveler breeds in northern areas of Europe, Asia, and North America. It is strongly migratory and winters south of its breeding range, in southern Europe, Africa, the Indian Subcontinent, South-east Asia, and Central & northern South America. It is also a rare vagrant to Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. No living subspecies are accepted today.

Habitat & behaviour: The Northern Shoveler is not as gregarious as other dabbling ducks, and is generally seen in small-to-large mixed flocks, usually including Northern Pintails, Pochards, Grebes and various Egrets. Its flat, wide bill is equipped with numerous lamellae – small, comb-like structures that act like sieves and allow it to skim crustaceans, plankton and aquatic invertebrates from the water surface. It feeds by dabbling along the water, swinging its bill from side to side, straining the water while retaining any food material. Wet grasslands with some vegetation, and mud-bottomed marshes that are rich in invertebrate life, are therefore its preferred habitat. It is a relatively quiet species. The call of the male is a clunking call, whereas the female usually utters a quack.

Nesting: The Northern Shoveler breeds mainly between April and June. Its nest, a shallow depression in the ground lined with down, grass or other plant material, is usually built in grassy areas away from open water. The usual clutch consists of 7-16 plain, off-white or buff eggs, sometimes with a greenish tinge.

Local name: The Northern Shoveler is known as *'tidari', 'punana', 'tokarwala' or 'ghirah'* in Hindi and *'mattimikh cherevi'* in Tamil.

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For Private Circulation Only
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